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Chairman: Mr. Aliyev ..... (Azerbaijan)

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05-55566 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 29: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space (A/60/20 (Supplement No. 20) and Corr.1)

1. **The Chairman** announced that following the three presentations to be made on the item, there would be an interactive dialogue with the presenters.

2. He recalled that at the 2005 World Summit, leaders from around the world had recognized that science and technology were vital for achieving development goals. Space-based technology continued to demonstrate its contribution to ensuring better lives for everyone. It had played a crucial role following many of the natural disasters of the past year, including the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and, most recently, the mudslides and flooding in Southern Mexico and Central America resulting from Hurricane Stan and the devastating earthquake on the border between India and Pakistan. In all cases, satellite images had been used to assess the damage and help rescuers focus on the areas most urgently in need of help. Satellite-based communications had also been used to connect the afflicted areas with the outside world, since terrestrial networks had been all but destroyed.

3. The peaceful uses of outer space could contribute significantly to implementing the Millennium Declaration, as well as the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the World Summit on the Information Society. Space applications could contribute to cost-effective water resource management, as well as to the prediction and mitigation of water-related emergencies. Given the unequal distribution of water resources, space-based solutions to water management were particularly important to developing countries. Tele-education projects in several countries were bringing high-quality education to students and educators at all levels, including those in remote areas of the globe who otherwise would have no access to schools and universities. Similarly, the use of satellite communications in telemedicine made quality public health accessible to the underprivileged in areas that had limited health care.

4. United Nations treaties and principles provided a legal framework that ensured the continued peaceful exploration and use of outer space for the benefit of all humankind. A growing number of States had realized the benefits of those instruments and were signing and ratifying them. To ensure that the benefits provided by space technology reached all countries, particularly developing countries, international cooperation was crucial. The United Nations, through the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, played a pivotal role in ensuring that countries continued to work together to bring the fruits of space activities to people around the world. One example of such cooperation, the International Satellite System for Search and Rescue, known as COSPAS-SARSAT, used space technology to assist aviators and mariners in distress around the globe. It currently had 37 member States, representing every continent, and had rescued over 18,000 persons in more than 5,000 incidents since 1982.

5. The International Charter "Space and Major Disasters" sought to provide a unified system of space data acquisition and delivery. Its seven member agencies provided free, real-time Earth observation images to civil protection authorities responding to major disasters. Since it had become operational in November 2000, it had been activated over 80 times, in response to both natural and man-made disasters. The United Nations system was able to request data from it through the Office for Outer Space Affairs, which cooperated with the Charter.

6. The third Earth Observation Summit had been held on 16 February 2005 in Brussels. It had established a Group on Earth Observations (GEO), consisting of over 50 States and 30 international organizations and had endorsed a 10-year implementation plan that would be the backbone of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). Such a system would bring together a large number of space and in situ Earth observation resources and datasets currently in use around the world and create a sustainable network for the distribution of data and information products and services. GEOSS would also identify gaps in the acquisition of Earth observation data and facilitate the bridging of such gaps.

7. **Mr. Abiodun** (Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) said that the natural disasters of the past year had dramatically demonstrated the vulnerability of human societies to the forces of nature and the need for redoubled disaster reduction efforts and enhanced disaster response.

8. At the 2005 World Summit, heads of State and Government had reaffirmed their commitment, inter alia, to promoting sustainable development and had recognized the important role that science and technology could play in that regard. In particular, they had committed themselves to supporting research designed to address the special needs of developing countries in the areas of health, agriculture, conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, environmental management, energy, forestry and climate change, to promoting technology transfer; to helping developing countries devise national strategies for human resources, science and development, and to working to establish a global early warning system for all natural hazards. The tools and benefits offered by the use of space would be a key element in meeting those goals.

9. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had long realized that a number of space technologies and applications were available to meet numerous developmental challenges, such as reducing poverty and preventing infectious diseases and environmental degradation. Space applications could provide timely reliable information for decision-making in many areas of economic and social life, as well as reliable communications where ground networks were unavailable or had been destroyed by a disaster.

10. Among its achievements, the Committee on the peaceful uses of outer space had been instrumental in the adoption by the General Assembly of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and had organized three United Nations conferences on the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space (UNISPACE). The resolution "The Space Millennium: Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development", adopted at UNISPACE III and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/68, outlined a strategy for addressing global challenges and involving space technology in solving some of the most pressing issues on the global development agenda. In October 2004, the General Assembly had conducted a five-year review of the progress achieved in implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III and had endorsed a Plan of Action, proposed by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, for the further implementation of the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development and for the achievement of the targets set by the Millennium Declaration, particularly as articulated in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

11. Drawing attention to the Committee's report (A/60/20 (Supplement No. 20) and Corr.1), he said that during the past year the Committee had considered, inter alia, the following items: implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III, ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes, the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee at their 2005 sessions, spin-off benefits of space technology, space and society and space and water.

12. The Committee and its two Subcommittees had devoted a great deal of time to considering the outcomes of the General Assembly's five-year review of the implementation of UNISPACE III recommendations. The action teams created by the Committee had proved to be a unique and useful mechanism for ensuring the implementation of those recommendations. The Committee had agreed to establish a closer link between its work on the implementation of the UNISPACE III recommendations and the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. It would be transmitting to the Commission's next session a document outlining how space applications could contribute to the Commission's consideration of thematic clusters. The Committee had also included in the agenda for its next session an item on the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society, to the implementation of which it intended to contribute. Lastly, it had discussed the work of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications and he was pleased to note that the Programme was stepping up its efforts to help countries develop and implement new projects as a follow-up to various programme activities.

13. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee had begun to consider an item on space-system-based disaster management support. Under a three-year workplan, it would share information on existing national and international space-system-based disaster management systems and would identify the long-term perspectives of Member States and space agencies in that area. Natural disaster management was a huge challenge for the countries concerned and the Subcommittee had therefore examined the possibility of creating an international space coordination entity for disaster management. At its next session, it planned

to hold a one-day workshop on disaster management, involving communication and meteorological satellite operators.

14. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee had also continued its work on space debris, under a new workplan for the period 2005 to 2007, and the Working Group on Space Debris had finalized the first draft of a document on space debris mitigation. The Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space had made significant progress in its work on issues relating to the establishment of an international, technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of nuclear power sources in space. The Subcommittee had amended the initial workplan for that item, extending it to 2007. At its most recent session, the Subcommittee had organized a symposium with the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) on "High-resolution and hyperspectral satellite data integration for precision farming, environmental monitoring and possible new applications". At its next session, it was to hold a symposium aimed at strengthening its partnership with industry, at which synthetic aperture radar missions and their applications would be discussed. It proposed to include in its agenda a new item on International Heliophysical Year 2007, as a contribution to preparations for that event. Lastly, the United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities had reported to the Subcommittee on the results of its 2005 session and had submitted to it for consideration a report on the coordination of space-related activities among United Nations entities and a report on space-related technologies and applications that could enhance inter-agency cooperation. It had held an open informal meeting for Committee members and observers to present various space-related initiatives by United Nations agencies and had updated the brochure "Space solutions" on the use of space technologies in United Nations activities related to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals.

15. The Legal Subcommittee had established a new Working Group to examine the practice of States and international organizations in registering space objects. It had reconvened its Working Group on the preliminary draft protocol on matters specific to space assets to the Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment. It had decided to continue to review developments concerning the protocol, but had been unable to reach a consensus on whether the United Nations should serve as the supervisory authority thereunder. It had also re-established the Working Group to consider matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space.

16. Reviewing the benefits derived from the use of space technologies to meet everyday needs, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had agreed that spin-offs of space technology should be promoted because they energized industries through the creation of new and innovative technologies and made significant contributions to improving populations' quality of life. Under the item on space and society, it had focused on space tools for education, while under the item on space and water, it had noted that space applications could contribute to cost-effective water resource management and predict and mitigate water-related emergencies. Lastly, a symposium on "Space and archaeology" had been held. At the Committee's next session, a symposium on space and forests would be held. In conclusion, it was important to consider the evolution of space activities and how the Committee could develop a long-term plan to enhance international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

Presentations and interactive dialogue

17. **Mr. Abiodun** (Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) gave a presentation on "Contributions of space science and technology, to sustainable development challenges", which he illustrated with slides. Sustainable development could be defined as "Satisfying present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" or as "The meeting of fundamental human needs while preserving the life support systems of planet Earth, with the understanding that regional and local needs differ globally". The fundamental life support systems were air, land resources, water, agricultural resources and a wholesome environment. Preservation of those systems was being endangered by anthropogenic and human detrimental impacts on the Earth's environment. The universal view was that without the industrial and agricultural revolutions, planet Earth would still be in equilibrium. Human activities affecting the Earth's climate and environment included toxic emissions from industry, deforestation, the unregulated discharge of domestic and industrial

waste, petroleum-related pollution and population explosion, and the consequences of those activities included global warming due to greenhouse gas effects, ozone depletion, rising sea levels and drought and related desertification. It was also universally accepted that planet Earth was a unified system and that events such as a volcanic eruption in one location, or the recurring El Niño phenomenon, could have repercussions in other parts of the world. The net effect of all those harmful actions was excess carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere, holes in the ozone layer over the North and South Poles and rising global temperatures. One specific result was water scarcity, with once-abundant sources of water drying up. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), water scarcity would be a major issue in the coming 20 years. The Ministerial Declaration adopted at the Third Water Forum, held in Japan in March 2003, had stated: "To ensure a sustainable water supply of good quality, we should protect and use in a sustainable manner the ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store and release water, such as rivers, wetlands, forests and soils".

18. The starting point for such action was knowledge. Humankind needed adequate knowledge based on geo-referenced information that was accurate, timely and affordable and could meet the needs of all the issues associated with water supply (by nature) and demand (by humans and other elements within ecosystems). In that connection, General Assembly resolution A/RES/1721 (XVI) had called for a study on measures to advance the state of atmospheric science and technology so as to provide greater knowledge of basic physical forces affecting climate and to develop existing weather forecasting capabilities.

19. The collection, analysis and use of geographic information was thus a starting point for sustainable development, because the poor quality of data collection and management in many societies prevented any meaningful plan of action from being undertaken. Decision-makers must recognize that maps and geospatial data were as much a part of a nation's infrastructure as transportation networks, health care, education, telecommunications and water supply. Accurate maps were needed, for instance, to avoid locating roads, housing and farms in disaster-prone areas. Using a base map in conjunction with a computer allowed geographical referencing of a large array of Earth-observation and satellite data and provided the accurate information needed in many areas of development.

20. Space technology also served sustainable development. Satellite data had many applications in the management of water resources and in disaster reduction and relief. Research by specialized agencies on the stratospheric ozone layer had provided the scientific underpinning for the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its amendments, and data from research satellites had led to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A wide range of national and international satellites and satellite systems were currently providing valuable information about the Earth and its chemical, meteorological and oceanographic life-support systems, as well as data needed for search-and-rescue operations, disaster management or the accurate mapping of wetlands and ocean and coastal resources.

21. Decision-makers, especially in countries without a space capability, should make it their priority to: fund basic and applied scientific and technological research and development in sustainable development fields, both nationally and regionally; translate satellite measurements of radiance into information applicable to real development problems; and establish a space-based network for joint research by national and regional institutions.

22. It was a myth that space science and technology was the exclusive preserve of industrialized countries, when in fact it was an indispensable tool for addressing sustainable development challenges. National talents everywhere should be cultivated and the necessary tools developed. It had long been recognized that without the development of a broad-based indigenous scientific and technological infrastructure, the countries of the South could not simply transfer expertise from abroad.

23. **Mr. Merrell** (Director, Medical Informatics and Technology Applications Consortium, Virginia Commonwealth University), giving a presentation on "Telemedicine and e-Health for International Medical Issues", said that the reality of contemporary medical practice, now that there was simply too much medical information for one trained mind to encompass, was that medical practitioners dealing with patients were trained to become information managers, relying on reliable telecommunications and digitalized

information to support their decisions and follow common standards. Electronic patient health records were also becoming the rule.

24. Since the cost of computing and telecommunications was in fact falling while the cost of delivering traditional medicine was rising at alarming rates, the hope was to apply the economies of the former to strained medical budgets, in order to make health care more affordable and accessible.

25. Telemedicine had come into being with the replacement of print media by electronic media and the use of satellites. His own Consortium had been working for a decade, under a charter with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), to set up practical telemedicine systems in remote and hostile environments in 20 developing countries, in which it had been able to test the potential, limits, utility and cost of telemedicine involving use of the Internet, phonelines and low-Earth-orbit and geosynchronous satellites and, working in partnership with their Governments, to integrate those countries into an international continuum of information.

26. The systems thus created had been evolving over time. In Kenya, for example, an infectious disease team working in an area without power but bolstered by a telecommunications team had been able to treat thousands of children with the help of state-of-the-art information at a fraction of the usual costs. In the Dominican Republic, two surgical experts bringing telecommunications equipment had trained local doctors on site in an advanced surgical technique, with excellent clinical results, and had left behind a viable, sustainable surgical programme. In Pakistan, a telemedicine curriculum was being designed in a large urban medical school, which in six months should be able to send independent telemedicine units out into the neighbouring mountains. In the Amazon basin of Ecuador, primary health-care clinics covering a population of 2,000, subsequently integrated with populations in otherwise unreachable areas and linked to secondary surgical and hospital care, had been equipped with simplified electronic record-keeping methods and international Internet and satellite sources of information, with a resulting 70-per-cent success rate in treatment.

27. The Consortium had introduced telemedicine into extreme environments. It had been less of a challenge to do so on Mount Everest or in the Arctic Circle, however, where only a handful of people had been involved. The real complications arose in extreme environments such as the River Danube delta, a waterland without roads, where health systems serving a large population required more complex satellite and telecommunications support.

28. Natural disasters were not well served by telemedicine because the infrastructure for it was not in place. In the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, it had taken three months to set up the requested telemedicine assistance in the country, whereas after Hurricane Katrina, it had taken only four days to assist a digitally equipped NASA facility caring for 4,000 people.

29. Civil disruption was yet another situation in which the Consortium operated. During the break-up of the former Soviet Union, an Internet programme had been set up in the Russian Federation as early as 1995 and telescience and telemedicine courses had been developed. National telemedicine programmes linked to the information available via the Consortium had also been established in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, all of which offered training and grants. In 1999 in Kosovo, at a time when there had been no working medical system, a telemedicine centre had been set up in conjunction with the European Union and had been the sole source of information for a redeveloping medical faculty and a student body of 2,000. Subsequently, it had established a link to the World Health Organization (WHO) programme of online journals and had been integrated with other hospitals in the province.

30. Telemedicine was thus a tool of technology that could span a digital divide in a responsive, non-disruptive way. It could be tailored to most medical requirements; need not be expensive and could allow a leap-frog approach to medical improvement by bypassing the expenses of traditional health-care delivery. He appealed to United Nations decision-makers to consider telemedicine as an infrastructure upon which to build a healthier world that was enlightened by information, emboldened by effective tools, dignified by empowerment and made one by just and sustainable health programmes.

31. **Mr. Camacho** (United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs), presenting a briefing on selected items before the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, explained that regular

items were considered annually, whereas single-issue items appeared on the agenda for one year only unless otherwise decided. Subcommittee workplans involved a proposal from a State or group of States, discussion of the objective and establishment of a programme of work, results being presented for each of the three or four years of its duration. The outcome of that approach was new agenda items. The system allowed continuity, rotation of topics and the movement of some items in and out of the agenda. Draft resolutions would contain certain regular items for as long as a Subcommittee wished to discuss them.

32. One highly technical subject of concern to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee was the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. Such sources were needed on satellites for two reasons: to power their instruments when they were too far from the sun for solar panels to function efficiently, and to provide propulsion during deep space missions. It was important that those nuclear power sources should be subject to safety standards, since satellites were launched from and at times came close to Earth. From 2003 to 2006, one objective of the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space was to develop an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of space nuclear power source applications, in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). IAEA had been invited to participate and to define specific cooperation mechanisms for developing technical safety standards. In 2005, the Subcommittee had reviewed information from national and regional space agencies and had prepared an outline of the proposed framework. A three-day joint technical workshop was to be held with IAEA in 2006 to discuss potential new safety standards. The Working Group had met and communicated throughout the past year, a list of topics had been agreed and distributed and intersessional work was continuing. The outcome of the joint workshop would be a draft report proposing a number of technical safety standards for discussion at the Committee's June 2006 session.

33. Another highly technical subject of concern to the Subcommittee was space debris. Such debris was a hazard to both vehicles and persons in space. Man-made sources of debris included anything that had been put into orbit and was no longer useful, most debris being pieces smaller than 10 centimetres in diameter or tiny particles. Of the various measures for reducing that type of debris, the most effective was to mitigate the production of new debris, which required agreement both by States and entities with the capability to launch satellites and by States and entities that built or commissioned the building of satellites. The Subcommittee had drawn up multi-year workplans for dealing with the issue. In 2002, the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC), a small group of entities capable of launching satellites, had been invited to present proposals to the Subcommittee on the mitigation of debris production. Member States had been invited to comment on the proposals received and the Subcommittee had agreed to work intersessionally and to begin drafting a document on space debris mitigation, while also considering other issues such as the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. The process by which the document might be periodically updated would be considered in 2006. Debris-mitigation measures would be voluntary and it was vitally important therefore to encourage involvement and build consensus so that all would be prepared to abide by the agreed measures.

34. Those two issues illustrated a working principle of the Committee, whereby a relatively small number of States and entities such as space agencies worked at a highly technical level in one of the Subcommittees on items that were then presented to a forum, where those directly affected or participating at different levels could influence the eventual recommendations of the Committee or Subcommittee.

35. A new agenda item under the multi-year workplan for 2005 to 2007 was near Earth objects. Such objects were a comet or asteroids in orbit within 0.3 astronomical miles (AU) of Earth and presenting a potential hazard if they were greater than 150 metres in diameter and came within 0.05 AU of Earth. It was currently estimated that there was a 1 in 5,000 probability of a near Earth object named 2004MN colliding with Earth in 2036, the resulting impact being equivalent to a 1,000-megaton nuclear explosion. An international response was necessary and the Subcommittee was studying the different possibilities with a view to taking action in 2013. In 2005, States, international organizations, regional bodies and others would participate in near Earth object research.

36. The Legal Subcommittee had created a legal framework within which States and other entities could conduct their activities in outer space. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/116, the Secretary-

General had sent a letter to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of States that had not yet acceded to the international treaties governing the uses of outer space, as well as to intergovernmental organizations that had not yet declared their acceptance of the rights and obligations under those treaties. The initial response had been encouraging. The Subcommittee had also considered ways of promoting the harmonization of practice in registering space objects. The outcome had been positive, eliciting an increased flow of registration documents for previously unregistered objects, the establishment of more national registries and increased provision of information under General Assembly resolution 1721 B (XVI).

37. **Mr. Sen** (India) said that it was important to highlight the benefits of the application of space-based technologies. Since establishing a satellite-based early warning system for cyclones, for example, his Government had been able greatly to reduce the number of victims. The use of satellite technology had helped locate fish stocks and improve catches by several hundred per cent, while its use in resource mapping had, inter alia, achieved a 90-per-cent success rate in predicting where to drill for water. Products used in India's health sector, such as coronary stents and ultra-light equipment for handicapped children, were also by-products of missile technology.

38. Although technical mastery of the relevant space technologies was important, it was equally important to share the benefits of their applications. His Government had developed a connectivity mission in cooperation with the African Union, but had only limited resources available for that project. The international community must mobilize resources to ensure that space technology was used to promote development and to implement the Millennium Development Goals, and should concentrate not only on preventing the weaponization of outer space but also on ensuring greater access to space technologies and their benefits, including dual-use technologies.

39. **Mr. González** (Chile) welcomed the opportunity for an interactive dialogue on the item, which was very important for developing countries. Outer space could not be the exclusive preserve of countries that had space programmes, given the tremendous benefits potentially offered by space technology to even the most disadvantaged countries in areas such as natural disaster preparedness, telemedicine and education. The organization of practical information sessions such as the current one should be replicated by all the Main Committees of the General Assembly, in the context of reform of the United Nations aimed at increasing its efficiency and effectiveness.

40. He noted the development of telemedicine in the United States and Europe, but wondered whether the international community as a whole truly had access to it. He requested more information on the costs and accessibility of telemedicine in isolated regions, since it was important that such technology should be not only available but financially accessible.

41. In the context of regional efforts to promote space cooperation mechanisms, he recalled that the Fifth Space Conference of the Americas was to be held in Quito, Ecuador, in July 2006. In that context, he looked forward to the report of Colombia, as pro tempore secretariat of the Fourth Conference, on the organization of that Conference and related follow-up (A/AC.105/L.261), as well as to further information from the Government of Ecuador on the status of preparations for the Fifth Conference. His Government was to host a preparatory meeting for the Fifth Conference, with a focus on education in the context of natural disasters, which would be attended by a representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Regrettably, despite earlier promises to the contrary, the Director of the European Space Agency (ESA) would not attend. That was indicative of the relative lack of cooperation between technically advanced countries and countries that were less so.

42. He noted the contribution which the Government of India had made and was continuing to make in applying space technologies. It would be worthwhile for that Government to be invited not only to the preparatory meeting in Chile but also to the Fifth Conference in Quito to share its expertise in the practical application of space technologies. Lastly, he requested that the expert group established by the First Space Conference of the Americas be granted permanent observer status with the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

43. **Mr. Gallardo** (Peru) welcomed the new emphasis on using space technologies to address such problems as climate change and natural disasters. He wondered whether the benefits of space technologies had been highlighted during the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe. The report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the implementation of the recommendations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and

Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) (A/59/174) had highlighted the need to increase decision-makers' awareness of the benefits of space technology. He wondered whether there had been any signs of increased awareness in that regard.

44. Like the representative of Chile, he welcomed the opportunity for an interactive dialogue but noted that, at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, discussions of the benefits of space technology and on the outcomes of UNISPACE III had been poorly attended. It was therefore important to increase the issue's visibility, particularly the peaceful international use of space, which some countries did not necessarily consider to be in their best interest.

45. **Mr. González** (Chile) expressed regret that the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, in noting the importance of science and technology for development, did not contain a single reference to space technology, which could play a vital role in such areas as natural disaster prevention, distance education and telemedicine. It was clear that the United Nations and Member States were failing in their obligation to implement the recommendations of UNISPACE III.

46. **Mr. Abiodun** (Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) recalled that little attention had been devoted to the possible applications of space technology to sustainable development, other than at UNISPACE III. At the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, in the context of the implementation of UNISPACE III recommendations, a special plenary meeting had been held to increase awareness of the benefits of space technology and action teams had been established for each of the recommendations. A successful press conference had been held, but the panel discussion on UNISPACE III had been poorly attended.

47. It was clear that although large sums were being invested in space technology and its practical applications and developing countries were also being asked to invest in such technology, little had been done to highlight actual examples of its use. In consultation with the Director of the Office of Outer Space Affairs, he had resolved to make an effort to use the current meeting to provide Committee members with a practical demonstration of the benefits of space technology in everyday life. Such efforts would continue, in the context of both the Fourth Committee and the plenary General Assembly.

48. **Mr. Merrell** (Director, Medical Informatics and Technology Applications Consortium, Virginia Commonwealth University), responding to the representative of Chile concerning the underutilization of telemedicine, said that the health-care sector in the United States and Europe had a highly developed information infrastructure. Once medical information was available in an electronic format, it was easy to transmit. Unfortunately, the technology necessary to transmit such information to remote areas where ordinary telephone links did not exist and where the use of satellite technology would be required was very costly. While the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) had been very successful in allocating satellite band widths to help transmit medical information for the benefit of the population, costs in other regions could be prohibitive. In South America, for example, the cost of satellite dish technology could be 20 or 30 times higher than in the United States, assuming that technology was available and there was an appropriate regulatory body to oversee its use. He expressed frustration that while the media were able to use satellite technology to send out reports in the event of natural disasters, there did not seem to be a similar commitment to investing in satellite technology for telemedicine purposes.

49. **Mr. Camacho** (Director, Office of Outer Space Affairs), responding to the representative of India, noted the Indian Government's success in allocating resources to natural disaster prevention and mitigation systems that had been highly effective in reducing the number of victims, thereby demonstrating the importance of being proactive and allocating resources to preventive and warning systems that did not have a high public profile precisely because they were functioning quite well, rather than simply allocating enormous resources for assistance after a disaster occurred.

50. With regard to the statements by the representatives of Chile and Peru, he agreed that it was important to increase decision-makers' awareness of the benefits of space technology and that it was regrettable that meetings on that issue at the fifty-ninth session had been poorly attended. He recalled that his Office had always supported the Space Conference of the Americas, which had become a well-established forum for the discussion of space issues and was of benefit to the region. It was important to continue to exchange information and technology at the regional and interregional levels, including through South-South cooperation.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.